



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



JEROME B. THOMPSON, THE ARTIST.

JEROME B. THOMPSON.

OUR correspondent at Rome, in one of his late letters, severely castigates American artists, studying abroad, for their desertion of all that is native and American, for what is wholly foreign and antique. The rebuke, we are inclined to think, was just, in many cases; for we believe it is true, our painters become mere copyists, losing all their individuality in the presence of the Titians and Correggios and Corracis and Angelos which crowd the galleries and palaces of Rome. It is well that they should study these great masters with a pure devotion; but it is not well that for ever thereafter they should seek to reproduce those "studies" in everything they attempt. There are, in life and action, subjects enough crying out for expression, to crowd the portfolio of every artist in this country; and when Italian peasants and Madonnas, and Saints and Monks, and Roman ruins, and the Bay of Naples are all that are deemed worthy of the best efforts of our painters. it is evident this studying "abroad" is productive of a positive bad as well as its positive good. In this country, so redolent of life and originality—where human nature stands out in bold relief to be daguerreotyped—where field and flood and wood are full of all that constitutes beauty—it is a poor comment on the art-

ist's powers and taste that he shou'd ignore them all, and go abroad for his subjects.

But these strictures will only hold good, we think, as applied to the comparatively few native artists who are now abroad, or who, having been in Germany and Italy, have imported feelings and ideas of art that had better have been left abroad. The great mass of our painters are workers for the people, and paint with much of the same spirit of emulation that animates men in the pursuit of other professions; and therefore their productions are characterized by a grace of conception, a vigor of execution, and life of coloring, which we are prone to believe will become the leading characteristics of American Art. Certain it is that those artists who are now regarded as the most promising, and whose patronage is best, are those whose devotion to American subjects and feelings is impressed on all they do; and their popularity increases in the ratio of their appreciation of the spirit of the times, and the tastes of patrons.

No living artist, more than the subject of this sketch, catches the lights and shades of American life and humor; and consequently, none is more truly popular. With the true hand of the master, and a taste skilled and trained by much study, he adds that intangible faculty of seizing the most picturesque view of things, and succeeds in producing pictures

which literally *talk* with reminiscences and life. Born and bred on a New-England farm, he has pierced to the very spirit of country realities; and not a tree, or stream, or stable, or cart, or farm-boy, and man and maid, or pump, or hay-stack, or field, but has its associations and history for his ready pencil, and a language for his liberally laden pallet. This can only come from a love of the theme, as well as from a pure love of Art. Other artists may excel in chiaro-oscuro and limning, in exquisitely wrought draperies, and enchanting distances; but none that we are aware of embodies more truth and grace and *language*, than the gentleman of whom it is our pleasure to speak; and it is probable that none will attain to a greater popularity in his peculiar field. A few of the leading incidents of his life will not therefore, be inappropriate, in this meagre reference to the artist's labors and characteristics.

JEROME B. THOMPSON was born in Middleboro, Plymouth county, Mass., and at a very early age betrayed the genius within him. His father, a portrait-painter of some eminence, designed an older son, John, for the profession, and to give him all opportunity, consigned Jerome to the toils of the farm, severely discouraging the out-croppings of the artist-talent which he saw the boy possessed in no small degree. "Where there's a will there's a way" is a true old adage, and Jerome found time, by stealing away into the garret, to do much work in his way. When at work in the field, his slate was sure to be hid away in some friendly copse, where it caught many a visit from the persevering boy. A favorite sister shared her sympathy with the closely watched boy, and comforted him much by conniving at and assisting him in his labors. A good story is told of these stealthy interviews, and hours absorbed by the pallet in the garret. Jerome had at length succeeded in procuring a real, living sitter, in the person of his cousin—since become an eminent minister in the Episcopal Church—and all odd hours possible to be subtracted from the barn-yard and field, were given to the easel. The picture progressed finely, and was nearly done, when, presto! in came the angry father, knocking easel, artist, and all, into direful confusion: amid which the sitter escaped, and the unlucky boy beat a retreat, first securing his picture, which to this day he preserves as a relic of the disaster.



Such being the decided bent of his tastes, it is not strange that he deserted farming as soon as possible. By sign and various ornamental painting, he succeeded in laying up one hundred dollars, and with this stock in trade, accompanied by his good sister, he "started in business," opening a studio at Barnstable. By such economy as two such spirits alone could practice, and by dint of perseverance, he

obtained a good living, even in that barren spot. The Barnstable "Patriot" relates this incident as showing the rapidity with which he wrought:—"Some gentleman, who had been abroad, was remarking upon the ease with which some artists whom he had known would accomplish their work in a very short time. Thompson offered to bet that in five minutes he would paint a portrait of any gentleman

the party would select, which might be recognized by any one who knew the subject. The bet was taken, and one of the gallant landlords of the Globe Hotel was selected as the sitter. At it Thompson went, painting upon a piece of smooth pine board, and stopped on his task the minute the watch had ticked off his five minutes. The result was set up on a post in front of the house, and a little girl



passing on the opposite side of the street, named the original at once. The bet was immediately paid, and the artist had won a victory. The picture is still in existence, and probably adorns the boudoir of some young lady friend of the gallant bachelor who sat for it."

From Cape Cod the artist and his sister passed to New-York city, to cast their bread upon that turbulent sea of "noise

and confusion." Here he was not long in winning a position and a handsome support, while his admirable sister, as miniature painter, added much to her means and repute as an artist. "Mrs. Stephens' Monthly" referring to his portraits, said:—"Practice had given his pencil considerable force and power. There was at this time nothing lady-like or over-done in his pictures, but they were remarkable as

strong likenesses, and for that bold free coloring which distinguishes him now. He chose grand and bold, rather than beautiful subjects for his pencil, that is, when he had the power of choice, and his peculiar excellencies became remarkable, even at that early day."

After several years he went to England for study, and a wider experience, and there added to his repute considerably, returning home with money and added honors.

From the time of his return, Mr. Thompson may be said to have found his *forte*. From the study of Claude Lorraine, and Turner, and Hogarth, abroad, he found that his strength lay even more in country scenes and rustic life, than in general landscape and faces; and now he labors in the pastoral field, with the richest success, as his numerous and popular works attest.

We have not space to refer at length to various pictures, some of which, through engravings, have become well known to the public. Among them are the two illustrated in this article, which are well remembered by the frequenters of the Academy of Art. They are given as showing something of the spirit with which the artist catches country life and humor. We have studied many pictures, by foreign and home painters, who essayed the same field; and we are free to confess, that aside from some of the pictures by the Flemish and imitators of Adam Brauer, we have seen none which so genially and truthfully reproduce country experience, and pastoral beauty. Though in engraving many fine strokes are rendered coarse, and the power of color is wanting, the reader will not fail to see in the pictures graces and genius enough to mark the author as one of the most individual and worthy of our little army of artists.

Among Mr. Thompson's later pictures, are "The Apple Gathering," "The Watering Trough," "Recreation; or a Pic Nic scene in Vermont;" "October Afternoon," &c., &c. The first of these is having the honor of a reproduction on steel, by one of the best engravers in this country, which promises to be one of the most popular prints ever issued in this country. It will be on a plate 20x26 inches, and furnished for the low price of five dollars; or artist-proofs on India paper, for ten dollars; to be issued by Samuel Hueston, 348 Broadway, N. Y. We can most heartily commend this exquisite plate to all lovers

of what is admirable in art, and full of language in nature. Of the other pictures, much has already been said by "the papers." "Recreation," the *Home Journal* says, is pronounced by artists one of Mr. Thompson's best works. It is full of the graces of a dreamy, cozy afternoon, in the woods, where a party are enjoying it to the utmost. "October Afternoon" has called forth much happy comment. When the poets talk of a picture, there surely must be something in it. Isaac McLellan paid the picture a fine tribute in verse, from which we may quote :

"Rare painter! Thanks to thee we tend
For scenes to nature's self so true;
Thanks, that in nature's frostiest time,
When tempests veil heaven's glorious blue,
Though hedg'd by multitudes that swarm
In splendid square and squalid lane,
Perennial in thy works we find
Fair summer's bloom and Autumn's wane."

Our friends will be pleased to learn that Mr. Thompson is to give one of his characteristic paintings for our next collection. It is called "Going to Mill;" the reader may imagine, the picture from the title. We have good reason to promise something worthy of the artist and the Association.

Mr. Thompson is now in the prime of his strength, and American Art has hope of many good things from his easel. May he live long enough to grace the Art collections of his many patrons with pictures, for the study and emulation of those who shall come after him.

— 83 —

CHURCH'S "NIAGARA FALLS."—This painting, on exhibition at Williams & Stevens, is attracting some considerable attention. The *N. Y. Mirror* says of it:—"It is but just completed, and does Mr. Church as much credit as any previous effort of his pencil; indeed, it is universally acknowledged to be the best representation of Niagara Falls, ever painted." * * * Every minutia is attended to that could add to the *vraisemblance*; the shallow current at your feet on the verge of the stream, the rock jutting here and there above it, the low Canada shore, the tossing foam of the distant rapids, the half obscure sky, the tower on Goat Island, are all admirable; while, more than these details—the absolute spirit of the place seems caught. The hue of the water as it turns over the fall, the volumes of spray and mist so soon interfering with the sight, the gleaming sunlight here and there striking the mighty mass, and the rainbow half seen across the ever rising cloud—all these incidents evince the closest observation, the most poetic appreciation, and the happiest art."

HOME CORRESPONDENCE.

CHICAGO, April 25, 1857.



Y DEAR JOURNAL:— You made me promise to "write you some reflections on things as I saw them," and I must keep my word, even if I have nothing to say of consequence. Since leaving New-York, I have "traveled" considerable—have seen a great deal more of the world than one sees from the City Hall steps—though the New-Yorker will hardly believe *this*. He thinks New-York is everything and all other places nothing—he thinks no body knows anything but himself and a few others who *swell* up and down Broadway—he knows to a demonstration that "out West" is a place where the Five Points House of Industry boys all are sent, and, therefore, that it is a kind of superpenal colony, which devotes itself chiefly to raising beef for the New-York market, flour for New-York, chickens for New-York—in fact, that it is "out in the country" somewhere, not far from the Hudson, and especially created by Providence to raise produce for the consumption of the intelligent few of the Metropolis. Well, I will not say these were my impressions—they certainly are not my feelings now; and if I have left the city's ease and vices for the freedom and hard-scrabble of the West, I am a better and a wiser man.

I have been here just three weeks to day; and though an artist by profession, I confess I have not so much as thought of my easel and a public studio; so much that is new and strange is there to occupy my mind. I have traversed the streets from end to end—where any end could be found—have been up and down "the creek" until my legs almost refused to go any further; and everywhere it is the same bustle, hurry-scurry, exciting race of ambitious, shrewd, far-seeing men. I have caught "the fever," and no easel for me! I am "in the lumber trade," and mean to make my *eternal fortune* in two years. Perhaps you laugh at this declaration, and talk of shameful prostitution of talent, and blindness of the future; but I tell you there is no use talking—I have scratched, and daubed, and "been on exhibition" long enough to convince me that a *good living* is not in my colors, no mat-

ter what hues you would use in lighting up my profession and artist-life. I was one of some twenty young men who labored for years in New-York, for a mere pittance of a return—hoping all the time for "something to turn up;" but, unlike Mr. Micawber, nothing did turn up, and I resolved to "emigrate" to this place to better my fortunes, as my brothers had wisely done before me. It will be time to talk of Art-worship when I have "the dollars" to use, to place me above want, and to keep my mahl-stick off copies of great pictures. So I bid you adieu in the artistic line, but will do the "Cosmopolitan" any service that is in my power, for I believe it is a great and good institution, one which promises more for Art and Art-culture in this country, than any Association ever formed on this side of the Atlantic. Go on then, and though I shall have nothing on the walls of your galleries to attract all kinds of remark, like a theatrical woman's character; yet do believe I shall do you any favor I can; and shall hope to return to my *first love* when my fortune is made, and do something nice for your collections. By that time I think the "Cosmopolitan" will be one of the Art-features of this country, distributing thousands of works of Art each year to do good, and advance the tastes of the people.

Let me always, then, remain

Your sincere friend,

H. H.

[We are sorry indeed thus to part with our friend; but every man's business is his own, and it is not for us to say aught against the step. But, the rage for quick fortunes is a fever, contagious and dangerous, we believe; and we shall not be surprised if our artist yet regrets his venture in pine boards, and comes back to his canvas, if a sadder yet a wiser man. We have the consolation, that Harry is a good artist, and can make a "good living" at his easel, if he would use the same application and economy necessary for success in the lumber business. Wealth is *not* the one great thing needed to give content and happiness; and our friend will find, we think, even if his dreams of fortune are fully realized, that he is not a whit happier than when he painted heads for fifty dollars. Let us hear of your return to your first, and we know your best, love, ere another season rolls around.—ED.]